CHAPTER XVIII

SUBJECT AND PREPARATION

> Suit your topics to your strength,
> And ponder well your subject, and its length;
> Nor lift your load, before you're quite aware
> What weight your shoulders will, or will not, bear.
>
> —BYRON, *Hints from Horace*.

Look to this day, for it is life—the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence: the bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendor of beauty. For yesterday is already a dream and tomorrow is only a vision; but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day. Such is the salutation of the dawn.

—*From the Sanskrit*.

In the chapter preceding we have seen the influence of "Thought and Reserve Power" on general preparedness for public speech. But preparation consists in something more definite than the cultivation of thought-power, whether from original or from borrowed sources—it involves a *specifically* acquisitive attitude of the whole life. If you would become a full soul you must constantly take in and assimilate, for in that way only may you hope to give out that which is worth the hearing; but do not confuse the acquisition of general information with the mastery of specific knowledge. Information consists of a fact or a group of facts; knowledge is *organized* information—knowledge knows a fact in relation to other facts.

Now the important thing here is that you should set all your faculties to take in the things about you with the particular object of correlating them and storing them for use in public speech. You must hear with the speaker's ear, see with the speaker's eye, and choose books and companions and sights and sounds with the speaker's purpose in view. At the same time, be

ready to receive unplanned-for knowledge. One of the fascinating elements in your life as a public speaker will be the conscious growth in power that casual daily experiences bring. If your eyes are alert you will be constantly discovering facts, illustrations, and ideas without having set out in search of them. These all may be turned to account on the platform; even the leaden events of hum-drum daily life may be melted into bullets for future battles.

Conservation of Time in Preparation

But, you say, I have so little time for preparation—my mind must be absorbed by other matters. Daniel Webster never let an opportunity pass to gather material for his speeches. When he was a boy working in a sawmill he read out of a book in one hand and busied himself at some mechanical task with the other. In youth Patrick Henry roamed the fields and woods in solitude for days at a time unconsciously gathering material and impressions for his later service as a speaker. Dr. Russell H. Conwell, the man who, the late Charles A. Dana said, had addressed more hearers than any living man, used to memorize long passages from Milton while tending the boiling syrup-pans in the silent New England woods at night. The modern employer would discharge a Webster of today for inattention to duty, and doubtless he would be justified, and Patrick Henry seemed only an idle chap even in those easy-going days; but the truth remains: those who take in power and have the purpose to use it efficiently will some day win to the place in which that stored-up power will revolve great wheels of influence.

Napoleon said that quarter hours decide the destinies of nations. How many quarter hours do we let drift by aimlessly! Robert Louis Stevenson conserved *all* his time; *every* experience became capital for his work—for capital may be defined as “the results of labor stored up to assist future production.” He continually tried to put into suitable language the scenes

and actions that were in evidence about him. Emerson says: “Tomorrow will be like today. Life wastes itself whilst we are preparing to live.”

Why wait for a more convenient season for this broad, general preparation? The fifteen minutes that we spend on the car could be profitably turned into speech-capital.

Procure a cheap edition of modern speeches, and by cutting out a few pages each day, and reading them during the idle minute here and there, note how soon you can make yourself familiar with the world’s best speeches. If you do not wish to mutilate your book, take it with you—most of the epoch-making books are now printed in small volumes. The daily waste of natural gas in the Oklahoma fields is equal to ten thousand tons of coal. Only about three per cent of the power of the coal that enters the furnace ever diffuses itself from your electric bulb as light—the other ninety-seven per cent is wasted. Yet these wastes are no larger, nor more to be lamented, than the tremendous waste of time which, if conserved, would increase the speaker’s powers to their *nth* degree. Scientists are making three ears of corn grow where one grew before; efficiency engineers are eliminating useless motions and products from our factories: catch the spirit of the age and apply efficiency to the use of the most valuable asset you possess—time. What do you do mentally with the time you spend in dressing or in shaving? Take some subject and concentrate your energies on it for a week by utilizing just the spare moments that would otherwise be wasted. You will be amazed at the result. One passage a day from the Book of Books, one golden ingot from some master mind, one fully-possessed thought of your own might thus be added to the treasury of your life. Do not waste your time in ways that profit you nothing. Fill “the unforgiving minute” with “sixty seconds’ worth of distance run” and on the platform you will be immeasurably the gainer.

Let no word of this, however, seem to decry the value of recreation. Nothing is more vital to a worker than rest—yet nothing is so vitiating to

the shirker. Be sure that your recreation re-creates. A pause in the midst of labors gathers strength for new effort. The mistake is to pause too long, or to fill your pauses with ideas that make life flabby.

Choosing a Subject

Subject and materials tremendously influence each other.

"This arises from the fact that there are two distinct ways in which a subject may be chosen: by arbitrary choice, or by development from thought and reading.

"Arbitrary choice .... of one subject from among a number involves so many important considerations that no speaker ever fails to appreciate the tone of satisfaction in him who triumphantly announces: 'I have a subject!'

" 'Do give me a subject!' How often the weary school teacher hears that cry. Then a list of themes is suggested, gone over, considered, and, in most instances, rejected, because the teacher can know but imperfectly what is in the pupil's mind. To suggest a subject in this way is like trying to discover the street on which a lost child lives, by naming over a number of streets until one strikes the little one's ear as sounding familiar.

"Choice by development is a very different process. It does not ask, What shall I say? It turns the mind in upon itself and asks, What do I think? Thus, the subject may be said to choose itself, for in the process of thought or of reading one theme rises into prominence and becomes a living germ, soon to grow into the discourse. He who has not learned to reflect is not really acquainted with his own thoughts; hence, his thoughts are not productive. Habits of reading and reflection will supply the speaker's mind with an abundance of subjects of which he already knows something from the very reading and reflection which gave birth to his theme. This is not a paradox, but sober truth.

"It must be already apparent that the choice of a subject by development savors more of collection than of conscious selection. The subject 'pops

into the mind.' . . . . In the intellect of the trained thinker it concentrates—by a process which we have seen to be induction—the facts and truths of which he has been reading and thinking. This is most often a gradual process. The scattered ideas may be but vaguely connected at first, but more and more they concentrate and take on a single form, until at length one strong idea seems to grasp the soul with irresistible force, and to cry aloud, 'Arise, I am your *theme!* Henceforth, until you transmute me by the alchemy of your inward fire into vital speech, you shall know no rest!' Happy, then, is that speaker, for he has found a subject that grips him.

"Of course, experienced speakers use both methods of selection. Even a reading and reflective man is sometimes compelled to hunt for a theme from Dan to Beersheba, and then the task of gathering materials becomes a serious one. But even in such a case there is a sense in which the selection comes by development, because no careful speaker settles upon a theme which does not represent at least some matured thought."[1]

Deciding on the Subject Matter

Even when your theme has been chosen for you by someone else, there remains to you a considerable field for choice of subject matter. The same considerations, in fact, that would govern you in choosing a theme must guide in the selection of the material. Ask yourself—or someone else—such questions as these:

What is the precise nature of the occasion? How large an audience may be expected? From what walks of life do they come? What is their probable attitude toward the theme? Who else will speak? Do I speak first, last, or where, on the program? What are the other speakers going to talk about? What is the nature of the auditorium? Is there a desk? Could the subject be more effectively handled if somewhat modified? Precisely how much time am I to fill?

It is evident that many speech-misfits of subject, speaker, occasion and place are due to failure to ask just such pertinent questions. *What* should be said, by *whom*, and *in what circumstances*, constitute ninety per cent of efficiency in public address. No matter who asks you, refuse to be a square peg in a round hole.

Questions of Proportion

Proportion in a speech is attained by a nice adjustment of time. How fully you may treat your subject it is not always for you to say. Let ten minutes mean neither nine nor eleven—though better nine than eleven, at all events. You wouldn't steal a man's watch; no more should you steal the time of the succeeding speaker, or that of the audience. There is no need to overstep time-limits if you make your preparation adequate and divide your subject so as to give each thought its due proportion of attention—and no more. Blessed is the man that maketh short speeches, for he shall be invited to speak again.

Another matter of prime importance is, what part of your address demands the most emphasis. This once decided, you will know where to place that pivotal section so as to give it the greatest strategic value, and what degree of preparation must be given to that central thought so that the vital part may not be submerged by non-essentials. Many a speaker has awakened to find that he has burnt up eight minutes of a ten-minute speech in merely getting up steam. That is like spending eighty per cent of your building-money on the vestibule of the house.

The same sense of proportion must tell you to stop precisely when you are through—and it is to be hoped that you will discover the arrival of that period before your audience does.

Tapping Original Sources

The surest way to give life to speech-material is to gather your facts at first hand. Your words come with the weight of authority when you can say, "I have examined the employment rolls of every mill in this district and find that thirty-two per cent of the children employed are under the legal age." No citation of authorities can equal that. You must adopt the methods of the reporter and find out the facts underlying your argument or appeal. To do so may prove laborious, but it should not be irksome, for the great world of fact teems with interest, and over and above all is the sense of power that will come to you from original investigation. To see and feel the facts you are discussing will react upon you much more powerfully than if you were to secure the facts at second hand.

Live an active life among people who are doing worth-while things, keep eyes and ears and mind and heart open to absorb truth, and then tell of the things you know, as if you know them. The world will listen, for the world loves nothing so much as real life.

How to Use a Library

Unsuspected treasures lie in the smallest library. Even when the owner has read every last page of his books it is only in rare instances that he has full indexes to all of them, either in his mind or on paper, so as to make available the vast number of varied subjects touched upon or treated in volumes whose titles would never suggest such topics.

For this reason it is a good thing to take an odd hour now and then to browse. Take down one volume after another and look over its table of contents and its index. (It is a reproach to any author of a serious book not to have provided a full index, with cross references.) Then glance over the pages, making notes, mental or physical, of material that looks interesting and usable. Most libraries contain volumes that the owner is "going to read some day." A familiarity with even the contents of such books on your own shelves will enable you to refer to them when you want help. Writings read

long ago should be treated in the same way—in every chapter some surprise lurks to delight you.

In looking up a subject do not be discouraged if you do not find it indexed or outlined in the table of contents—you are pretty sure to discover some material under a related title.

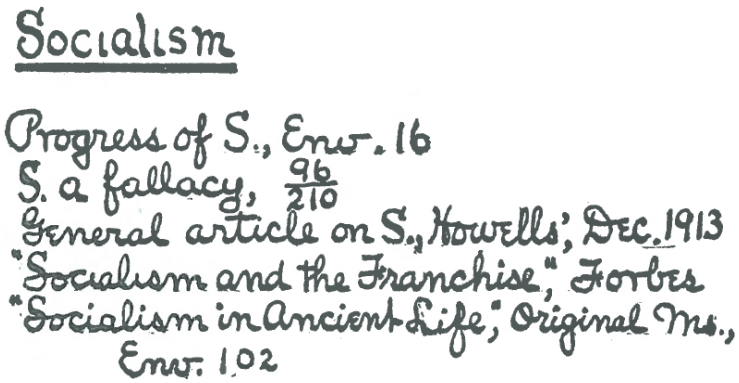
Suppose you set to work somewhat in this way to gather references on "Thinking:" First you look over your book titles, and there is Schaeffer's "Thinking and Learning to Think." Near it is Kramer's "Talks to Students on the Art of Study"—that seems likely to provide some material, and it does. Naturally you think next of your book on psychology, and there is help there. If you have a volume on the human intellect you will have already turned to it. Suddenly you remember your encyclopedia and your dictionary of quotations—and now material fairly rains upon you; the problem is what *not* to use. In the encyclopedia you turn to every reference that includes or touches or even suggests "thinking;" and in the dictionary of quotations you do the same. The latter volume you find peculiarly helpful because it suggests several volumes to you that are on your own shelves—you never would have thought to look in them for references on this subject. Even fiction will supply help, but especially books of essays and biography. Be aware of your own resources.

To make a general index to your library does away with the necessity for indexing individual volumes that are not already indexed.

To begin with, keep a note-book by you; or small cards and paper cuttings in your pocket and on your desk will serve as well. The same note-book that records the impressions of your own experiences and thoughts will be enriched by the ideas of others.

To be sure, this note-book habit means labor, but remember that more speeches have been spoiled by half-hearted preparation than by lack of talent. Laziness is an own-brother to Over-confidence, and both are your inveterate enemies, though they pretend to be soothing friends.

Conserve your material by indexing every good idea on cards, thus:



On the card illustrated above, clippings are indexed by giving the number of the envelope in which they are filed. The envelopes may be of any size desired and kept in any convenient receptable. On the foregoing example, "Progress of S., Envelope 16," will represent a clipping, filed in Envelope 16, which is, of course, numbered arbitrarily.

The fractions refer to books in your library—the numerator being the book-number, the denominator referring to the page. Thus, "S. a fallacy, $\frac{96}{210}$," refers to page 210 of volume 96 in your library. By some arbitrary sign—say red ink—you may even index a reference in a public library book.

If you preserve your magazines, important articles may be indexed by month and year. An entire volume on a subject may be indicated like the imaginary book by "Forbes." If you clip the articles, it is better to index them according to the envelope system.

Your own writings and notes may be filed in envelopes with the clippings or in a separate series.

Another good indexing system combines the library index with the "scrap," or clipping, system by making the outside of the envelope serve the same purpose as the card for the indexing of books, magazines, clippings and manuscripts, the latter two classes of material being enclosed in the envelopes that index them, and all filed alphabetically.

When your cards accumulate so as to make ready reference difficult under a single alphabet, you may subdivide each letter by subordinate guide cards marked by the vowels, A, E, I, O, U. Thus, “Antiquities” would be filed under *i* in A, because A begins the word, and the second letter, *n*, comes after the vowel *i* in the alphabet, but before *o*. In the same manner, “Beecher” would be filed under *e* in B; and “Hydrogen” would come under *u* in H.

Outlining the Address

No one can advise you how to prepare the notes for an address. Some speakers get the best results while walking out and ruminating, jotting down notes as they pause in their walk. Others never put pen to paper until the whole speech has been thought out. The great majority, however, will take notes, classify their notes, write a hasty first draft, and then revise the speech. Try each of these methods and choose the one that is best—*for you*. Do not allow any man to force you to work in *his* way; but do not neglect to consider his way, for it may be better than your own.

For those who make notes and with their aid write out the speech, these suggestions may prove helpful:

After having read and thought enough, classify your notes by setting down the big, central thoughts of your material on separate cards or slips of paper. These will stand in the same relation to your subject as chapters do to a book.

Then arrange these main ideas or heads in such an order that they will lead effectively to the result you have in mind, so that the speech may rise in argument, in interest, in power, by piling one fact or appeal upon another until the climax—the highest point of influence on your audience—has been reached.

Next group all your ideas, facts, anecdotes, and illustrations under the foregoing main heads, each where it naturally belongs.

You now have a skeleton or outline of your address that in its polished form might serve either as the brief, or manuscript notes, for the speech or as the guide-outline which you will expand into the written address, if written it is to be.

Imagine each of the main ideas in the brief on page 213 as being separate; then picture your mind as sorting them out and placing them in order; finally, conceive of how you would fill in the facts and examples under each head, giving special prominence to those you wish to emphasize and subduing those of less moment. In the end, you have the outline complete. The simplest form of outline—not very suitable for use on the platform, however—is the following:

WHY PROSPERITY IS COMING

What prosperity means.—The real tests of prosperity.—Its basis in the soil.—American agricultural progress.—New interest in farming.—Enormous value of our agricultural products.—Reciprocal effect on trade.—Foreign countries affected.—Effects of our new internal economy—the regulation of banking and "big business"—on prosperity.—Effects of our revised attitude toward foreign markets, including our merchant marine.—Summary.

Obviously, this very simple outline is capable of considerable expansion under each head by the addition of facts, arguments, inferences and examples.

Here is an outline arranged with more regard for argument:

FOREIGN IMMIGRATION SHOULD BE RESTRICTED[1]

I. FACT AS CAUSE: Many immigrants are practically paupers. (Proofs involving statistics or statements of authorities.)

II. FACT AS EFFECT: They sooner or later fill our alms-houses and

become public charges. (Proofs involving statistics or statements of authorities.)

III. FACT AS CAUSE: Some of them are criminals. (Examples of recent cases.)

IV. FACT AS EFFECT: They reënforce the criminal classes. (Effects on our civic life.)

V. FACT AS CAUSE: Many of them know nothing of the duties of free citizenship. (Examples.)

VI. FACT AS EFFECT: Such immigrants recruit the worst element in our politics. (Proofs.)

A more highly ordered grouping of topics and subtopics is shown in the following:

OURS A CHRISTIAN NATION

I. INTRODUCTION: Why the subject is timely. Influences operative against this contention today.

II. CHRISTIANITY PRESIDED OVER THE EARLY HISTORY OF AMERICA.
   1. First practical discovery by a Christian explorer. Columbus worshiped God on the new soil.
   2. The Cavaliers.
   3. The French Catholic settlers.
   4. The Huguenots.
   5. The Puritans.

III. THE BIRTH OF OUR NATION WAS UNDER CHRISTIAN AUSPICES.
   1. Christian character of Washington.
   2. Other Christian patriots.
   3. The Church in our Revolutionary struggle. Muhlenberg.

IV. OUR LATER HISTORY HAS ONLY EMPHASIZED OUR NATIONAL ATTITUDE. Examples of dealings with foreign nations show

Christian magnanimity. Returning the Chinese Indemnity; fostering the Red Cross; attitude toward Belgium.

V. OUR GOVERNMENTAL FORMS AND MANY OF OUR LAWS ARE OF A CHRISTIAN TEMPER.
   1. The use of the Bible in public ways, oaths, etc.
   2. The Bible in our schools.
   3. Christian chaplains minister to our lawmaking bodies, to our army, and to our navy.
   4. The Christian Sabbath is officially and generally recognized.
   5. The Christian family and the Christian system of morality are at the basis of our laws.

VI. THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE TESTIFIES OF THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY. Charities, education, etc., have Christian tone.

VII. OTHER NATIONS REGARD US AS A CHRISTIAN PEOPLE.

VIII. CONCLUSION: The attitude which may reasonably be expected of all good citizens toward questions touching the preservation of our standing as a Christian nation.

Writing and Revision

After the outline has been perfected comes the time to write the speech, if write it you must. Then, whatever you do, write it at white heat, with not *too* much thought of anything but the strong, appealing expression of your ideas.

The final stage is the paring down, the re-vision—the seeing again, as the word implies—when all the parts of the speech must be impartially scrutinized for clearness, precision, force, effectiveness, suitability, proportion, logical climax; and in all this you must *imagine yourself to be before your audience*, for a speech is not an essay and what will convince and arouse in the one will not prevail in the other.

The Title

Often last of all will come that which in a sense is first of all—the title, the name by which the speech is known. Sometimes it will be the simple theme of the address, as “The New Americanism,” by Henry Watterson; or it may be a bit of symbolism typifying the spirit of the address, as “Acres of Diamonds,” by Russell H. Conwell; or it may be a fine phrase taken from the body of the address, as “Pass Prosperity Around,” by Albert J. Beveridge. All in all, from whatever motive it be chosen, let the title be fresh, short, suited to the subject, and likely to excite interest.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Define (*a*) introduction; (*b*) climax; (*c*) peroration.

2. If a thirty-minute speech would require three hours for specific preparation, would you expect to be able to do equal justice to a speech one-third as long in one-third the time for preparation? Give reasons.

3. Relate briefly any personal experience you may have had in conserving time for reading and thought.

4. In the manner of a reporter or investigator, go out and get first-hand information on some subject of interest to the public. Arrange the results of your research in the form of an outline, or brief.

5. From a private or a public library gather enough authoritative material on one of the following questions to build an outline for a twenty-minute address. Take one definite side of the question. (*a*) “The Housing of the Poor;” (*b*) “The Commission Form of Government for Cities as a Remedy for Political Graft;” (*c*) “The Test of Woman’s Suffrage in the West;” (*d*) “Present Trends of Public Taste in Reading;” (*e*) “Municipal Art;” (*f*) “Is the Theatre Becoming more Elevated in Tone?” (*g*) “The Effects of the Magazine on Literature;” (*h*) “Does Modern Life Destroy Ideals?” (*i*) “Is Competition ‘the Life of Trade?’” (*j*) “Baseball is too Absorbing to be a Wholesome National Game;” (*k*) “Summer Baseball and

Amateur Standing;" (*l*) "Does College Training Unfit a Woman for Domestic Life?". (*m*) "Does Woman's Competition with Man in Business Dull the Spirit of Chivalry?" (*n*) "Are Elective Studies Suited to High School Courses?" (*o*) "Does the Modern College Prepare Men for Preëminent Leadership?" (*p*) "The Y. M. C. A. in Its Relation to the Labor Problem;" (*q*) "Public Speaking as Training in Citizenship."

6. Construct the outline, examining it carefully for interest, convincing character, proportion, and climax of arrangement.

NOTE:—This exercise should be repeated until the student shows facility in synthetic arrangement.

7. Deliver the address, if possible before an audience.

8. Make a three-hundred word report on the results, as best you are able to estimate them.

9. Tell something of the benefits of using a periodical (or cumulative) index.

10. Give a number of quotations, suitable for a speaker's use, that you have memorized in off moments.

11. In the manner of the outline on page 213, analyze the address on pages 78–79, "The History of Liberty."

12. Give an outline analysis, from notes or memory, of an address or sermon to which you have listened for this purpose.

13. Criticise the address from a structural point of view.

14. Invent titles for any five of the themes in Exercise 5.

15. Criticise the titles of any five chapters of this book, suggesting better ones.

16. Criticise the title of any lecture or address of which you know.

[1] How *to Attract and Hold an Audience*, J. Berg Esenwein.

[1] Adapted from *Composition-Rhetoric*, Scott and Denny, p. 241.